



Initial Fears of Further Regional Escalations Resulting from Iran-Pakistan Tit-for-Tat Strikes are Quelled Following the Agreement to Resume Full Diplomatic Ties

Earlier this week, Iran and Pakistan announced that they will resume diplomatic relations following a period of heightened tensions in which the two countries exchanged tit-for-tat missile strikes. The de-escalation efforts come nearly a week after Iran struck alleged terror targets inside Pakistan, and the latter responded with counterstrikes against purported terror hideouts in Iranian territory. This led to a sharp deterioration in diplomatic relations, with ambassadors being withdrawn and a spike in inflammatory rhetoric. The attacks had therefore understandably drawn alarm regarding the prospect of further regional escalations and wider-scale conflict, especially in the midst of already-existing tensions across the Middle East in Gaza, the Red Sea, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Thus, the mitigation of hostilities was welcomed by peace activists as a positive development.

The recent attacks between Iran and Pakistan were the first direct ones on each other's territory since the late 1980s. Iran launched a missile strike on a town in the Balochistan province of Pakistan, targeting alleged sites of Jaish al-Adl – a militant Baluchi separatist organization accused of carrying out attacks on Iranian security forces in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province. This prompted Pakistan to retaliate, striking supposed hideouts of Pakistani separatist groups such as the Baloch Liberation Front and the Baloch Liberation Army. Analysts have expressed that Iran's initial airstrikes were likely driven by domestic anxieties in the wake of the deadly ISIS regional affiliate bombing which killed more than 100 people and wounded many others at a memorial in Kerman for deceased general Qassem Soleimani. The missile strikes on Pakistan come amid other Iranian strikes in Iraq and Syria, all appearing to be part of a series of retaliations against perceived adversaries following the Kerman bombing. Back in December, Jaish al-Adl took credit for an attack on a police station in the Sistan and Baluchestan province, and Iran's interior minister criticized Pakistan's border security efforts as the reason why the incident was allowed to happen. Along the same line, Pakistan has its own issues with Baloch separatist groups and often accuses Iran of providing a safe haven for them. Issue experts have outlined that rather than placing blame and carrying out missile strikes on each other's sovereign territory, Iran and Pakistan would benefit more from collaborative intelligence sharing and initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of the Baloch separatist movements.

Various analysts have pointed out that one of the reasons for the tit-for-tat attacks has been domestic political considerations and the desire to appear strong, a trend exhibited throughout other conflicts in the region. According to AP, the image of a strong military plays a key component in Pakistan's upcoming general election and was allegedly one of the justifying reasons for the counterstrike. When dealing with the fragility of foreign affairs, leaders would be wise to pursue a policy of restraint instead of pandering to their domestic voter base, which could ultimately lead them down a dangerous path to war. What worried observers in the immediate aftermath of the tit-for-tat strikes is the fact that the situation materialized at a time when the wider region is already embroiled in tension on multiple fronts due to Israel's ongoing hostilities in Gaza. Commentators have stressed how the outrage over actions there is a definite cause of much of the turmoil that has manifested including the Red Sea crisis and the circumstances along the Israel-Lebanon border. Therefore, the spike in Iran-Pakistan tensions merely added to existing fears of further regional aggravations. Following Iran and Pakistan's initial move to withdraw ambassadors from each other's respective capital cities, the two countries later agreed to de-escalate by returning the aforementioned diplomats to their posts and planning for an upcoming visit between foreign

ministers. Those talks are slated to take place in Islamabad next week, and will focus on how to best handle the threat posed by insurgent groups and mutual border security.

The move to alleviate tensions in the aftermath of the Iran-Pakistan strikes were a welcomed development in the aim of preventing further regional escalations. International spectators such as the U.S., China, and the United Nations had played a role in advocating for the de-escalation between the two countries, with U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres advising that the two operate with restraint. This successful de-escalation may indicate that there is hope for more diplomatic solutions in the region as well. For this reason, influential global actors such as the United States should prioritize pursuing diplomatic approaches to tensions in the Middle East and refrain from using any potential heavy-handed tactics in the region.